The London 2012 Legacy for Primary Physical Education: Policy by the Way?

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Abstract

Legacy rhetoric claiming to inspire a generation of young people has pervaded the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics from the initial bidding processes, through to post events discourses. On the eve of the closing ceremony David Cameron, published a statement on the Number 10 webpage stating a desire to put competitive sport at the heart of a new curriculum for primary Physical Education. This intention will impact upon a congested policy space within which it is the dominant discourse, rather than the most appropriate, which will prevail and will result in the formation of policy by the way. This paper examines the potential impact of the statement from Number 10 on pedagogical practice within Primary Physical Education.

Keywords: *Physical Education, Primary Education, Curriculum, Olympic Legacy, Competitive Sport*

Introduction

1.1 Since the revival of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, resulting legacies have occurred in a range of forms most commonly by the way of physical structure or artefact (Cashman 1998). However, it can sometimes be the social impact and the resulting behaviours than can be as equally as durable and arguably more powerful (Ritchie 2000). In recent decades the practice of setting out legacy commitments by host cities and their respective governments has become standard practice, illustrated ahead of the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games that was held in London in 2012 (DCMS 2007). A central tenet within the London legacy commitments was how the games was to 'Inspire a generation of young people.' (DCMS 2007: 4). Both during the Games and in its aftermath, government rhetoric was awash in the media concerning the different ways in which our young people were going to be inspired. Significantly however, it was on 11 August 2012, on the eve of the close of the games that the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, published a statement on the Number 10. webpage stating that we will put 'competitive sport for children at the heart of Olympics legacy' (HM Government 2012).

1.2 The new national Physical Education curriculum which is to be published in draft in the year to follow the Olympic Games will now:

'require every primary school child to take part in competitive team sport like football, netball and hockey, and will include team outdoor and adventurous activity. The Physical Education programme of study, which will be slimmer and more focused, aims to:

- enable pupils to be physically active for sustained periods of time;
- develop pupils' competence in a broad range of physical activities;
- provide opportunities for pupils to engage in competitive sports and activities and help pupils to lead healthy and active lifestyles.'

In March 2013, this statement was reinforced with a government promise of new funding for school sport and PE worth £150m a year for the next two years (Roan 2013).

1.3 The impact and influence of a particular event or policy upon the planning of another, evident here, is what Dery (1998: 163) has termed 'policy by the way'. Here dominant discourses and rhetoric are

favoured and permitted often without understanding the appropriateness or impact that may result. Where these impacts are most sharply felt are in crowded and contested policy spaces.

1.4 As a curriculum subject Physical Education finds itself in an arguably unique position, in a 'crowded and contested policy space' (Penney 2008: 35) with felt pressures from three competing discourses and policy areas, namely Sport, Education and Health (Houlihan & Green 2006). The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential impact of Cameron's statement on Primary Physical Education through an analysis of the discourses contained within two key areas; the contested policy space and the historical evolution of the Primary Physical Education curricula. The impact of these discourses on pedagogical practice are then examined which inform conclusions upon the presence of a 'policy by the way' approach within the Number 10. Statement.

Primary Physical Education within a contested policy space

2.1 Despite the identification of motives such as playfulness, participation, enjoyment and catharsis (McIntosh 1968), contemporary notions of sport are characterised by highly competitive activities rooted in team games played within boys' public schools. Importation of these games into state schools and a post Second World War influx of men into the teaching profession who championed a skills focused approach, typical of sports, created a subject shaped by the practices of competitive sport (Kirk 1992). Discourse has shifted 'away from valuing individual creativity and problem solving towards performance, away from process to product' (Wright 1996: 340). Not surprisingly, reviews of Primary Physical Education by the Office for Standards in Education consistently identify an over-concentration on performance and the delivery of an imbalanced, multi-activity curriculum dominated by games (OFSTED 2005). Primary Physical Education lessons all too often reflect a 'watered-down' version of a secondary Physical Education programme, in which children are presented with developmentally inappropriate and complex activities (Jess 2010). The foundations of this 'sporting model' (Capel 2007: 494) of Physical Education are embedded within a mode of pedagogical practice of 'physical education as sport techniques' characterised by formal, didactic and teacher centred pedagogy (Kirk & Kinchin 2003).

2.2 Such pedagogical approaches have been continually reproduced by teachers' own socialisation within Physical Education and have served to keep the subject on the periphery of school curricula, as break from intellectual pursuits within more serious academic subjects (Kirk 2010). This marginalisation of Physical Education within primary school curricula is deeply rooted in Cartesian philosophical perspectives of mind-body dualisms, in which the physical remains separate and inferior to cognitive activity (Sparkes et al. 1990). Such an approach to education was enshrined in the hegemonic legacy of the Hirst-Peters thesis of education, based upon the premise that education is concerned with the development of valuable theoretical knowledge and intelligence (Green 2008). Within this context the 'practical' knowledge of Physical Education is denounced to activities in which pupils were merely required to learn a 'knack' or 'trick' (Peters 1996). Subjects deeply rooted within rational forms of knowledge, such as Science and Mathematics have remained at the forefront of school curricula. Indeed, the publication of annual results for all primary schools within these subjects has led teachers to deliver a narrow focus within any given programme of study (Compton 2007) as 'most head teachers and subject leaders have concentrated on the raising standards agenda' (OFSTED 2005: 2). This heightened awareness of a results and an outcomes driven system, has been given greater value to the point where 'performativity' can be seen to be 'hijacking the creativity discourse' (Turner-Bisset 2007: 201). The impact of this has been sharply felt in Physical Education which has been reduced to something of a second class subject, with lessons taught at the end of a school day or as a 'break' from focused, class based learning. As a consequence, expectations of primary Physical Education remain low other than keeping children active and healthy (Griggs 2012).

2.3 Associations between health and Physical Education in the UK can be traced back before the development of the Foster Acts of the late nineteenth century. The 1905 syllabus for 'Physical Training' explained that: 'The primary objective of any course of physical exercises in schools is to maintain, and if possible, improve the health and physique of the children' (Board of Education 1905: 9). More holistic health discourses appeared in the 1980s and related to both the physiological and the psychological benefits of Physical Education (Fox & Biddle 1988). This led to the gradual emergence of piecemeal efforts to deliver what were termed health-related exercise/activity/fitness, however, it was not until a series of robust, longitudinal studies that identified the importance of regular physical activity across the lifespan that these became a larger feature of primary Physical Education curricula (Bailey et al. 2009). The most significant source of discourse has been the rhetoric and research which has focussed attention upon physical inactivity (Steinbeck 2001). An important outcome of this increased attention was the development of age-appropriate national physical activity guidelines for children, recommending the accumulation of at least one hour of physical activity per day (NASPE 2002). The sustained impact of this guidance on school Physical Education programmes appears to be, as yet, limited (Cale & Harris 2005). That said, significant authors in the field such as Trost (2006: 183) still maintain that physical education programs in schools are uniquely situated to address the problem of 'sedentary behaviour plaguing our youth worldwide'. With health agendas becoming centred towards performance outcomes and a proliferation of policies geared towards measuring and defining young people's bodies (Evans et al. 2008), health could well become reduced to yet another 'measurable' outcome for pupils to achieve. Indeed Tinning (2012) indicates that this renewed focus upon linking health and Physical Education will potentially dominate the next texts and narratives for the subject.

Curriculum history and evolution

3.1 Historically, the story of primary education within the United Kingdom has been comparatively short. It was not until the 1960s that pupils aged five to eleven, could be educated in schools specifically designed for that age range (Oliver 2004). Yet, by the end of the decade two seminal but polarising

documents, namely the Plowden Report (CACE 1967) and the 'Black Papers' (Cox & Dyson 1969a, 1969b), would represent key viewpoints on what quickly become highly contested terrain. The Plowden Report encapsulated child centred theories of education enshrined in its maxim 'at the heart of education lies the child'. It was unashamedly humanistic in tone and brought the needs of children to the fore by encouraging them 'to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them' (CACE 1967: 187). In practical terms, the report paved the way for the expansion of nursery education, the greater involvement of parents and gave schools the freedom to determine their own curriculum ideas (Oliver 2004).

3.2 In stark contrast the polemic 'Black Papers' (so called in direct opposition to Government White Papers) spelt out a distinct conservative and traditional vision of education, positioning themselves against so called 'progressive', 'liberal' ideas purveyed in the Plowden Report and championing a subject focused, teacher directed and prescribed curriculum (Harnett & Vinney 2008). Finding a balance between these opposing viewpoints coloured the educational landscape for the next two decades and prompted the HMI publication of a series of documents which summarised key aspects of the debate. In 'The Curriculum from 5–16', HMI stressed the importance of a holistic view of education, with the necessity of locating core educational experiences within broad areas of learning (DES 1985). This thinking shaped the drafting of the Education Reform Act (ERA 1988), which led to the first incarnation of the National Curriculum in England and Wales. However despite the vision advocated by HMI, the Act specified the need for a focus on separate subjects. English, Maths and Science were determined to be *core* to the new curriculum, whilst another six areas, of which Physical Education was one, were termed *foundation* subjects. The content or 'Programme of Study' of each subject was then created by separate working groups (DES 1991).

3.3 Within primary Physical Education, pupils were required to experience six activity areas comprised of athletic activities, dance, games, gymnastic activities, outdoor and adventurous activities and swimming. The requirements for these were divided into Key Stage 1 and 2, arbitrary lines drawn at seven and eleven years of age respectively, with 'End of Key Stage Statements' expressing idealised pupil attainment (DES 1991). Though the newly formed curriculum gave primary pupils significantly more breadth in most cases, fitting all the prescribed content for all subjects into a school timetable soon became a concern leading to what became known as the Dearing Review (Webb 1993). In 1995 further revision of the National Curriculum was produced in light of this review which largely saw the breadth of curriculum maintained but the prescribed content within each subject significantly reduced (Rawling 2001). However more important than the process here, was the timing of the drafting of the new orders. During this period, the Conservative government of the mid 1990s, headed by Prime Minister John Major, sought to relaunch itself, under the maxim of 'Back to Basics'. Educational policy became dominated by the 'New Right' which had a traditional, 'Restorationist' agenda (Kelly 1999) echoing the Black Papers of a quarter of a century earlier. Critically for Physical Education this period saw the publication of 'Raising the game' (DNH 1995) which extolled the virtues of participating in competitive team games and sport, the ideals of which were firmly rooted in the Victorian era (see Mangan 1981). As a consequence the 1995 revision of the National Curriculum became an example of Dery's (1998) 'policy by the way' and 'was a narrow curriculum experience' (Green 2008: 36) in which games was afforded a superior status in both time and importance and other activity areas became subordinate (Penney & Evans 2005).

3.4 Under the subsequent Labour Government, a further revision of the primary curriculum occurred in 1999 which restored a degree of balance and within Physical Education rescinded the superiority held by games over other activity areas. Furthermore, there was a strengthening of the process to be engaged upon within each area, specified as Acquiring and Developing Skills, Selecting and Applying Skills, Evaluating and Improving Performance, Knowledge and Understanding of Fitness and Health (DfEE/QCA 1999).

Impact of policy on practice

4.1 Despite the lack of overt references to sport and competition in the current National Curriculum for Physical Education, subsequent policy statements have sought to reinforce a pro-sport ideology (Houlihan 2002). In October 2002 of the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links strategy invested in excess of £1½ billion into Physical Education and School Sport within the UK. At its core was the creation of multiple networks of both primary and secondary schools known as School Sport Partnerships (SSP). With its overall objective to enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by 5–16 year-olds a public service agreement (PSA) pledged to engage children in at least two hours high quality PE and sport at school each week (DfES/DCMS 2003). The expectation on staff to increase their delivery time was raised still further with the injection of another £¾ billion with the introduction of the 'PE and Sport Strategy for Young People' which has been pledged to 'create a new "5 hour offer" for all' (DCSF 2008).

4.2 In order to meet such ambitious targets of engaging children in two hours high quality PE and sport at school each week the number of 'Adults other than teachers' (AOTTs) used in primary schools increased dramatically, specifically sports coaches (Lavin et al. 2008). This shift was also facilitated by the 'National Agreement' (DfES 2003) which began to remodel and broaden the school workforce particularly in England and was 'designed to tackle the problem of workload, and the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention' (Gunter 2007: 1). From 1st September 2005 all teachers gained an entitlement to a guaranteed minimum of 10 per cent of their timetabled teaching commitment for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA). Known individuals working within the school community who were trusted were employed to cover the timetable gap and in some case outside agencies were indiscriminately brought in as convenient, available and cheap options (Griggs 2010). Studies showed that in many cases that both schools and coaches struggled to develop PPA cover into a meaningful experience for pupils (Griggs 2008). At the heart of the concerns was the trend moving sports coaches employed thus far to deliver extracurricular

'sport' to an increased delivery of curricular Physical Education as these lessons were moved into the PPA timetable gaps (Blair & Capel 2008a, 2008b).

4.3 More recent research reporting a willingness for primary schools to give up delivery of curriculum Physical Education to outside agencies as a result of both time and financial pressures is further cause for concern (Griggs 2010). The position is perhaps better understood when the amount of training primary teachers receive is brought into perspective. Primary Physical Education training can amount to as little as nine hours on a one-year Post Graduate Certificate of Education course and just five hours for those involved with School Centred Initial Teacher Training (Caldecott et al. 2006a, 2006b). This has led to concerns about the impact this has upon teacher confidence (DeCorby et al. 2005) and has shown that low levels of teacher confidence in delivering physical education are apparent amongst non-specialists which dominate the primary sector (Morgan & Bourke 2008).

4.4 Inadequate training of staff, low confidence and off-putting personal experiences of teachers within Physical Education have created a significant challenge to the subject within Primary Schools (Griggs 2007). Under New Labour the SSP programme created a degree of stability in planning, communication and delivery of Physical Education and school sport, which aimed to overcome these challenges. However, the withdrawal of SSP funding and the reinstatement of a much poorer and skeletal structure of School Games Organisers, has served to reduce specialist support for primary teachers (Mackintosh 2012). The desire to build an elite system of Olympians upon the footings of Primary Physical Education lessons opens the door wider to external providers who are willing to become part of this popular post Olympic legacy. Subcontracting Physical Education lessons to anyone to 'the nearest confident person in a tracksuit' (Griggs 2010: 45) who purports to be a specialist, becomes legitimised by the language of increasing competition in traditional specialist sports. Reconciliation between performativity discourses couched within the Number 10. Statement and delivering quality learning experiences to developmentally diverse, captive audiences, across developmentally extensive primary school age ranges, appears insurmountable. Educational relevance, equality of opportunity, curricula access and differentiation; key considerations which educational discourse provides for Primary Physical Education, are being overlooked for sustained involvement in physical activity and success in specialised competitive sport. This conflation of Sport and Physical Education and reemphasis upon performativity discourses, reflects what Evans (2012: 12) calls 'contemporary obsessions with standards of performance and corporeal perfection'. The position Primary Physical Education within such policy milieu becomes utilitarian and rests upon a taken for granted assumption that participation has the capacity to 'affect the dispositional resources (motivations/attitudes/willingness/desire – fundamental cultural capitals) of pupils for performance or participation in sport in and out of school' (Evans & Davies 2010: 768).

4.5 Previous approaches based upon this assumption, which have directed Physical Education to concentrate on a narrow menu of competitive sports, have not been effective in maintaining young people's involvement in playing sport after leaving school (Green 2002). The championing of traditional and recognisable British games by the Number 10. Statement; football, netball and hockey, within a desire for establishing an Olympic legacy ignores our proven track record of medal winning sports; rowing, cycling, sailing, athletics and equestrian events. If the objective is to promote competitiveness in Olympic team games a widening of the diet of specialist games to include for example; basketball, handball and volleyball (prominent Olympic team games) would seem more logical. The intention to discard games activities as they are not recognised and recognisable sports, contradicts research within the fields of Physical Education and Youth Sport. Rather than narrowing Physical Education curricula there is a growing body of literature which calls for pupil experiences in school to reflect the dynamic culture of active-leisure preferences of young people (Green 2002). Research has focused upon the 'dropping-off' and 'dropping-out' of active participation in physical activity between Primary and Secondary School and at the end of post compulsory education. Evidence suggests that these two phenomena are lessened by a broadening of Physical Education curricular and reemphasis upon options of recreational lifestyle-orientated sports, which reflect the agency that young people, particularly adolescents, desire (Green 2012). Shoe-horning Physical Education into a 'one size that fits all' approach of competitive sport and sustained physical activity assumes that the outcomes of competition and mechanised approaches to health are good and appropriate for all. Empirical evidence suggests otherwise (Evans 2012).

Conclusions

5.1 The absence of any publication of a Primary Physical Education curriculum since 1999 and the diminished SSP policy and funding since 2011, has created a space within the congested nexus of Health, Education and Sport discourses, within which the subject finds itself. The desire for Cameron's statement that Physical Education must return to curricula focussed on competition within specialised traditional sports, couched in Olympic legacy rhetoric, hails a return to the contested terrain of the 'Black Papers'. Physical Education curricula have historically fluctuated between an emphasis upon breadth and balance and a prescribed diet of narrow sporting activities. Within this context performativity discourses within education have reinforced the position of nationally tested subjects and has forced Physical Education to the periphery of primary school curricula. On these margins, policy has also demanded a focus upon competitive sport as a means to develop future sporting champions, in addition to alleviating contemporary concerns with increasing sedentary behaviour by training pupils to adopt lifelong participation in physical activity. Teachers tasked with navigating this policy space are increasingly insufficiently prepared to meet these conflicting demands and as a consequence have subcontracted delivery to agents who offer an inexpensive, if superficial solution. The rhetoric of the Number 10 statement demonstrates little acknowledgement of these challenges and presents an opportunistic, oversimplified solution to complex and wider social and environmental issues. Rather than being based upon substantive evidence, Cameron's statement appears to be 'policy by the way' attached to the rhetoric of public health concerns and Olympic legacy.

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